



Ministry  
of Defence

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Via email: [REDACTED]

10 April 2024

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your correspondence requesting the following information:

*“about the most recently held joint US-UK nuclear weapon emergency exercise ('Dimming Sun', 'Diamond Dragon', or equivalent):*

- *A copy of the briefing document for the exercise.*
- *A copy of the post-exercise evaluation report.*
- *A copy of the regulatory assessment for the exercise.*
- *A copy of the all-agency review report for the exercise.”*

Your correspondence has been treated as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). A search for the information has been completed and we can advise that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) holds information in scope of your request.

At Annex A you will find two briefing documents for the exercise, Player Instructions, and Distaff and Assessor Instructions, as well as the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator Assessment. Some of the information contained within these documents falls within scope of the exemptions provided for at Sections 24 (National Security), 26 (Defence), 27 (International Relations) and 40 (Personal Information) of the Act and has been withheld. Sections 24, 26 and 27 are qualified exemptions which means the information can only be withheld if the public interest in doing so outweighs the public interest in disclosure. We can confirm public interest tests have been carried out and the results are summarised below.

Section 24(1) provides that information is exempt for the purpose of safeguarding national security. It applies to some of the information in scope relating to security measures in place, operational procedures and locations, descriptions of infrastructure, codewords and IT systems. The MOD recognises that there is a public interest in providing greater openness and transparency around emergency response measures relating to US nuclear weapons being conveyed within UK airspace. However, there is also a strong interest in protecting national security and withholding details that would allow potential adversaries to build a greater understanding of UK and US air transport operations involving defence nuclear materials. There is no advantage in releasing information that would make future operations more vulnerable to the potential interception by hostile actors endangering the safety of the Armed Forces, Emergency Services and the wider public. This would in turn prejudice our ability to maintain the UK's Continuous At Sea Deterrence (CASD), and there is no wider public interest in reducing the effectiveness of the nuclear deterrent which is the ultimate guarantee of our national security. The balance of public interest was found to lie in favour of withholding this information to safeguard the national security of the UK.

Section 26(1) provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice (a) the defence of the British Islands or of any colony, or (b) the capability, security, or effectiveness of the Armed Forces. It applies to the same information as Section 24 and the arguments for and against release of the information are similar to those under this exemption. Release would provide greater openness and transparency around US defence nuclear air transport operations within UK airspace, and the emergency response measures in place. However, it could allow potential adversaries to use operational and security information from the most recently held exercise to disrupt future air transport operations and emergency response activities. This would have the effect of threatening the security of the individuals and organisations involved with these operations and our ability to maintain CASD, which would in turn prejudice the defence of the British Isles and the capability and effectiveness of the Royal Navy. The balance of public interest was found to be in favour of withholding this information as its release would prejudice the defence of the British Isles and the capability, effectiveness, and security of the Armed Forces. As the exemption is prejudice based, the level against release of the exempted information has been set at the higher 'would' rather than the lower 'would be likely to'.

Section 27(1) provides an exemption for information if its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice relations between the UK and any other state. It applies to the same information as Sections 24 and 26, and as with these exemptions, release of the information would improve public understanding of UK and US nuclear emergency response measures. However, release of details provided in confidence on the US position and priorities around nuclear emergency activities would undermine our relationship with the US. This would negatively impact future collaboration on nuclear matters and may also affect wider defence and government collaboration. Like Section 26, the exemption at Section 27 is prejudice based and the level against release of the exempted information is also set at the higher 'would' rather than the lower 'would be likely to' as its release would prejudice the UK's relations with any other state.

Some of the information in scope falls entirely within the remit of the absolute exemption provided for at Section 40(2) of the Act and has been redacted. Section 40(2) has been applied to some of the information in order to protect personal information as governed by the Data Protection Act 2018. Section 40 is an absolute exemption and there is therefore no requirement to consider the public interest in deciding to withhold the information.

The post-exercise evaluation report and the all-agency review report for the most recently held Exercise Diamond Dragon, which took place in 2015, have been withheld under Section 21 (Information reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means) of the Act.

Under Section 16(1) of the Act, public authorities should provide advice and assistance, so far as it would be reasonable to do so. You may find helpful the Lessons Identified Report and a report published by the Suffolk Resilience Forum relating to Exercise Diamond Dragon 2015. These reports can be found at the links below:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8196f440f0b62305b8fc4e/20160428-EX\\_DD-Lessons\\_Identified\\_Report-Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8196f440f0b62305b8fc4e/20160428-EX_DD-Lessons_Identified_Report-Final.pdf)

<https://suffolkprepared.co.uk/about/news/suffolk-resilience-forum-partners-support-joint-uk-us-training-exercise/>.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact this office in the first instance at the address above. If informal resolution is not possible then you may request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A

2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has completed. They can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on their website, <https://ico.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely,

Defence Nuclear Organisation Secretariat